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**By Rep. Charlie Bass**

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IF YOU ARE like me and use the Internet to access information and connect with people as part of everyday life, you may have noticed the recent blackouts and protests of websites like Wikipedia, Google, and Reddit in opposition to the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA).

This legislation (H.R. 3261), as well as its Senate companion known as the Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA, S. 968), is designed to provide legal recourse for copyright and trademark rights holders against the theft of their intellectual property by foreign "rogue" websites. While laudable in its intent to thwart copyright infringement and counterfeiting, this legislation is likely to cause more harm than good because it fails to appreciate the Internet's key characteristics.

As a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over communications and technology, I have heard expert testimony on the factors that have contributed to the Internet's growth as a platform for a democratic exchange of ideas and economic growth. Perhaps the Internet's greatest design features are its decentralized architecture and universality. This means that anyone can add a page or link to the World Wide Web from any computer, in any language, using any software, without needing permission from a centralized authority to do so.

Without question, this dynamic design has spurred the Internet economy, where individuals have taken their innovative ideas from garages to record-setting Wall Street IPOs and created countless U.S. jobs in the process. At a time when we are trying to spur our nation's economic recovery, it would be unwise to advance legislation that creates uncertainty in this vibrant sector.

In addition to the Internet's positive economic impact, there is something more important at stake in this debate: freedom of speech and the free flow of information in a democratic society. One of SOPA's greatest deficiencies is its conception of the Domain Name Service (DNS), which allows users a readable pathway to the numeric IP addresses that define the web, and a proposal to block the domain names of foreign rogue sites.

Blocking a domain name, or more technically, requiring an Internet Service Provider to not resolve a domain name query to a particular IP address, could undermine the core of the Internet and erode our nation's standing in the international arena.

Proper resolution of domain name queries to the associated IP address is the foundation of trust on the web. Without knowing, for example, that you are on the legitimate site for your bank or favorite online retailer rather than an imposter site, commercial transactions online would grind to a halt.

Moreover, DNS manipulation is the hallmark of authoritarian governments and their Internet censorship regimes, such as in China, where the state's practices have become known as the

"Great Firewall of China."

Though SOPA and PIPA's proponents have recently signaled they are willing to back away from the DNS provisions of the legislation, before moving forward with the remaining proposal, we should think long and hard about the value of our nation's international leadership when it comes to preserving the fundamental liberties of a free society.

This debate isn't a choice between stopping piracy and the stealing of ideas and products online versus maintaining the free and vibrant nature of today's Internet.

Both goals can and will be achieved, but the solution isn't SOPA. Congress can do better.

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